

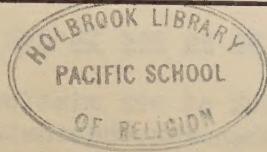
"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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## AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS FROM JESUS' POINT OF VIEW

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The increasing emphasis now placed upon agricultural and rural missions is evidence of the vitalization of our mission program. We have long recognized the part that education and healing have in making evangelism more effective. Now through ways of winning freedom from want and from hunger we approach still more closely to the example of Jesus' ministry.

### What would Jesus do?

In seeking a basis for mission policy I like the approach of Charles M. Sheldon, author of In His Steps, the book which ranks next to the Bible as the best-seller of all times. In this story the leading character directs his life by asking the question in each difficult situation, "What would Jesus do?"

There are three passages of scripture which are especially helpful. In the ninth chapter of John and the first verse we read "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth". This typical passage is one which brings out a fundamental element in the character of Jesus. He saw human misery; sickness, hunger, and sorrow. In the eighth chapter of Mark and the second verse we read, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days and have nothing to eat." He had compassion on them. He suffered together with them. He felt what he saw. Jesus saw human need; he became deeply moved by it; and he did something about it. And usually what he did involved helping someone to help himself. This sequence was continually recurrent throughout Jesus' ministry.

Goodspeed, in his Life of Jesus states that in the earliest gospel "He is presented to us, not so much as a teacher, but as a doer, a man of

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action, whose first impulse when he saw people in distress or need was to help them out." But because of his ministry to human need people flocked to him in great numbers so that he had multitudes to hear his teaching and his preaching. Jesus summarized his ministry in his words as given by John in the tenth chapter and the tenth verse, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

### What do we see in our Mission fields?

Let us now look at our mission fields and try to see them as Jesus would see them; then ask what he would have us do to bring about the more abundant life.

#### The need for land stewardship.

One thing we see are peoples, who in contrast with our highly industrialized United States, are predominantly agrarian. And yet in these lands where the ideal of the good life is the farm home where each family has its own vine and its fig tree, most of the good earth is in large landed estates. Many of the rural people work as laborers for the landlord in the big house while they themselves dwell in wretched hovels. The village church is often made up of under-employed laborers in semi-serfdom.

We in the United States who have evolved through a history where land was given away in 160 acre units, have difficulty in realizing that one of the most pressing problems of the world is the unfair distribution of land. One of the appealing lures of the communists is the promise to break up the holdings of wealthy landlords and give a farm to each one who has none. Of course, they merely confiscate the property and give it to no one. But the need for land reform on a just and Christian basis is one of the first essentials in raising the standard of rural living as well as in opposing the onward sweep of communism.

#### Conservation of the Divine Inheritance.

I believe Jesus would see and be deeply distressed by the reckless wasting of the soil which the Heavenly Father has been evolving throughout the ages to provide man's food. The devastation of the soil is one of the chief factors responsible for the economic distress of nations and peoples in the underdeveloped countries. This is particularly true in Brazil. The planters in that country have followed the disastrous policy of cutting and burning the forest, mining out the fertility, then moving Westward to virgin areas to repeat the process. The ravages of torrential summer rains have swept the top soil from once fertile fields. Brazil has today a greater proportion of worn-out land than any country I know. Today she is reaping the whirlwind. Hundreds of millions of coffee trees are not producing a tenth of what they should. We feel the effects of Brazil's shortage of coffee but in that country it is economic disaster. And there is shortage of rice, beans, meat and milk as well as coffee. Prices are soaring as the inflation spiral mounts.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." When by His gracious providence man has been given stewardship over a parcel of life-

giving soil for a brief period and then is false to his trust, his sin is more grievous than if he had robbed a bank. He or his relatives might be able to repay the bank. But when the top soil which the Father has been creating for milleniums is stripped away by floods, it is usually beyond man's power to put it back. He has sinned against his children's children and against God. Against such a cardinal sin it is the duty of the church to preach and teach.

### Rural Health.

I am sure Jesus would see the sickness so prevalent among rural peoples in all the poorer countries. He would see great populations where more than 85% are infected with internal parasites, usually hookworm, and who have never known a dentist, suffering intense pain and sometimes even losing eyesight from infected teeth. He would see children permanently stunted from malnutrition.

### The Rural-Urban Shift.

Jesus would see the mass migrations from the poverty and misery of the country to the bright lights of the over-crowded cities. And there in the cities He would find disillusionment and disintegration of character among those who came from rural areas and found conditions more intolerable than those they had left behind.

In Brazil the people of Rio de Janeiro, the "cidade maravilhosa" boast that theirs is the most beautiful city in the world, yet back of its fine palaces in settings of tropical flowers and verdure, are drab hills without water, without streets, without sewers, where thousands of squatters huddle in a maze of shacks they have built of tin cans and boxes.

The city of Sao Paulo like Rio has a population of more than 2,000,000 and proudly proclaims that it is growing faster than any city in the world. But much of this growth is from the country, taking producers from the farm and adding to the consumers in the city. The city's skyscrapers glisten in the sun and flowers bloom in beautiful parks. But people line up in queues for bread, for milk, for meat, for transportation. With inflation the cost of living has soared to the limits of endurance. The misery in the cities has provided a rich soil for the growth of communism.

### The Problem of Hunger.

Jesus was moved with compassion by the hunger of the multitude that followed him.



Dr. John B. Griffing

How his heart must bleed with the knowledge that the majority of the world's population still go to bed hungry every night. In our mission fields we have not yet begun to see the problem of hunger clearly. Our approach is nearly always based upon sentiment and is limited to temporary relief. In areas where irresponsible procreation is the rule, feeding the hungry often aggravates the problem as much as it ameliorates.

Before World War II the standard of living throughout Latin America was very low. Since that time, partly through aid and technicians from the United States, food out-put has been boosted 34%. That would seem a great achievement. But the appalling fact is that population in the same period has grown 39%. The shadow of the specter of hunger throughout these and other undeveloped countries is looming darker than before.

One aspect of overpopulation which we should not overlook is that a child born into a teeming human ant hill has little opportunity to grow into the good life. Out of the favelas of Rio pour a flood of delinquents. Our settlement work such as that of the Instituto Central do Povo can salvage only a pitifully small percentage.

One fallacy which leads many to shut their eyes to reality, is the erroneous idea that there is really plenty of land in such countries as Brazil that could produce food in abundance for everyone. One writer refers to the Amazon Valley as capable of feeding the entire world and suggests dramatically that perhaps it is "the last hope of a plundered planet." A more accurate picture is given by Dr. Pendleton who is probably our first ranking authority on tropical soils. In a recent article in Crops and Soils he points out why we must depend upon the temperate zones for any great increase in food production, and why the Amazon Valley has never been able to produce sufficient food for its own sparse population and probably never will.

No, we can no longer depend upon the opening of great new areas of fertile land for the feeding of hungry people. This is a problem that we must see, and see quickly for time is running out. We need to look beyond the superficial aspects of the problem and give it our most profound thought. We can not relieve the hunger of the world by throwing a few crumbs from our bounty to hollow eyes famishing children. The solution involves changes in methods of agriculture looking toward greatly increased production. It also involves basic changes in the very culture patterns that will bring irresponsible procreation under control.

#### Establishing an Indigenous Church.

The most inspiring thing we see in the mission field today is a picture of opening doors, the progress of dynamic evangelism and the growth of the church. Six years ago my wife and I began to worship with a band of believers in a tiny room of the home of one of the members. It was possible to pack twenty-three persons besides the preacher in that little room. In a short time, with some help from the United States, the little group bought a lot on which was a duplex house. They made two rooms over into a chapel that would hold fifty. Then they began to build their new church. In due time, the first floor was ready with capacity for three hundred, and five

rooms for classes besides the original chapel. When I revisited this church in April and May of this year, I found that the group was planning to complete the main building over this first floor and do it entirely with their own resources. I found too that the workers of this church have pushed out into four new centers for evangelism or Sunday Schools. I have never seen a church where the members were more consecrated, more united, more evangelistic, or more self sacrificing in giving. This is a genuinely indigenous church and now has no foreign assistance in either money or personnel.

The spirit of nationalism stimulates a desire on the part of people in other countries to establish and maintain their own churches. The chief obstacle to this goal is poverty and low standards of living. One of the great opportunities of agricultural missions is to help remove this obstacle.

These, then, are some of the problems in our mission fields that I believe Jesus would see today. Let us now ask in the same spirit what he would have us do about them.

#### Service through Agricultural Missions

In the first place it seems evident that in addition to preachers, teachers, doctors and nurses, we need workers who are especially qualified in agricultural or rural work. But right here I wish to sound a warning. We should avoid separating mission work into air-tight compartments. The mission, in my opinion, should be INTEGRATED EVANGELISM in which workers team together in bringing about the abundant life. In fact, in many instances all of the functions of preaching, teaching, healing, and helping to lift the standard of living may be carried on by a single individual. With this principle of integration in mind let us summarize briefly the possibilities that exist for effective service by workers with training in agriculture. We may draw illustrations from past experience.

1. Mission Agricultural Colleges. As far as I know the first degree granting college under mission auspices was founded in 1911 by Rev. Benjamin Hunnicutt of the Southern Presbyterian Church, at Lavras, Brazil. The achievements of this college in training efficient honest leaders with a unique spirit of service are immeasurable. Whatever I have been able to accomplish in that country has been due in no small measure to the unselfish efforts of able assistants from Lavras.

The College of Agriculture and Forestry of the University of Nanking, a union mission institution came into being shortly after the work at Lavras was organized. It was my privilege to serve there eight years.

At the same time, Sam Higginbotham was establishing the Allahabad Institute. The far reaching and profound changes in both agriculture and culture that the Institute brought about gave Sam an acceptance, recognition, and influence among Indian leaders beyond that ever enjoyed by any other American.

These institutions and others like them came into the field when there was a vacuum to fill. They became patterns for other institutions private and state. They produced much needed leadership. Now the scene

has changed in most countries. Agricultural colleges abound everywhere. It is difficult to imagine circumstances where a mission would today be justified in starting a new agricultural college. Moreover, the cost of such an undertaking today would be stupendous. The same would be true for experiment stations and research centers.

2. Schools with Agricultural Practice. There is opportunity in some mission fields for schools of primary and high school level that give agricultural instruction and practice. Such schools make a unique contribution in character building by giving dignity to work with hands. Some give a chance for back country boys from poor families to earn their way. They can give a type of education, too, which can turn the student back to serve his country area, whereas academic schools turn their students toward the city.

It is not always possible for a mission to provide the necessary budget and personnel for an agricultural school, but without the minimum essentials its success would be limited.

#### The Demonstration Farm.

A demonstration farm as an independent project is difficult to justify. Such a farm, operated even by an agriculturally trained man too often demonstrates what should not be done or what will not pay for the small farmer. A new-comer to a tropical country needs two or three years to adjust to environmental conditions that are vastly different from those to which he is accustomed. He often finds, for example, that the highly mechanized processes in which he has been trained operate at a loss in the foreign field. He has to learn which of his new ways are, and which are not appropriate.

The educational effect of the demonstration farm may often be obtained more safely and effectively and far more economically by introducing new ideas through farmer neighbors. When hybrid corn, for example, is successfully grown by one farmer, we may be reasonably sure that all of his neighbors will learn about it. The demonstration is even more effective when the hybrid is introduced through boys' and girls' clubs, whose home projects convince the parents, and whose exhibits and programs convince the community. We call this extension service and it is one of the great doors open to us. The cost is moderate and the plan of with the people is similar to the methods used by Jesus.

#### Integration of Agricultural Missions with Evangelism, Healing, and Education.

By taking the agricultural worker out of his compartment and permitting him to cooperate with other members of the team in vitalizing their total program we have an opportunity of accomplishing much for little. Our evangelists also, too often separate themselves in their compartments from the realities of this world. In their other-worldliness they sometimes lose their touch with those struggling to make both ends meet here below. At times they feel the same sense of futility that Moses felt when he said to the Lord, "Behold they will not hear me nor harken unto my voice." You know the response, "And the Lord said unto him, what is that in thine hand." A Brazilian pastor with hybrid seed corn in his hand found that he had a

means of awakening the community in a remarkable manner. This hybrid in Brazil sometimes gives an increase in yield of more than 100%. For the pastor this seed became one of the most effective ways of winning friends and influencing people. The agricultural worker has become the means of putting the achievements of agricultural science into the evangelists' hands.

Conditions vary in different countries but there are many ways of greatly boosting farmer production. Our American International Association has been working for six years to discover and develop ways of improving country living in two municipios (counties) chosen for demonstration. The accomplishments have attracted national attention and the methods developed are being copied in other places. We erected no buildings and operated no farms. We simply introduced new ideas. But these ideas resulted in raising the income and standard of living throughout the area very substantially. We have endeavored to pass these ideas on to pastors that they may bring the benefits to their rural parishes.

A few of the most effective techniques promoted in addition to the introduction of hybrid seed corn were:

1. spraying of dairy cattle to protect them from ticks and grubs;
2. construction of trench silos to provide feed through the six months dry season;
3. protection of the soil against erosion;
4. recuperation of old coffee plantations;
5. setting new plantations with high bred, high yielding coffee;
6. preparation of compost for soil building;
7. promotion of home gardens;
8. promotion of boys' and girls' clubs.

For all of these things we had simple circulars of instruction which the pastor could use as he became the middle man between the agricultural technician and the farmer. Extension service is one of the great doors open to missionaries today.

Should any one doubt that a pastor could persuade farmers to adopt new ways, permit me to say that even young women have done so with remarkable results. For three years it was my privilege to conduct a Saturday morning gardening class for young women at the Instituto Metodista near Sao Paulo where young women received training in social service for the work of the church. We took up many things besides gardening and visited farms to see some of the problems and how to solve them. The work of these girls after their graduation was really surprising. One example may be cited. Dona Angelina was a talented student, an accomplished musician and religious leader. Upon graduation, she married a fine young pastor and went with him to an interior post. After some time there she sent me a letter appealing for help. She wrote in part, "I have used all the seed collections you gave me for the promotion of home gardens, if you could spare more they will be useful. Also please send more circulars on how to make trench silos, I have persuaded one farmer to construct one and several others are interested. Please send some more circulars on making compost I am teaching a number of people how to make it. The hybrid corn has grown well and is creating a sensation."

In 1951 it was my privilege to cooperate with Bishop Cyrus Dawsey and Rev. Charles Clay of the Methodist Church in holding the first agricultural conference for Christian workers ever attempted in Brazil. There were seven Brazilian pastors present and seven young women from the Institute for Training in Social Service. We studied activities in the farms and rural clinics during the day and discussed what we saw in night meetings.

The next year we had two such conferences, one with 18 present and one with 38. The response was not enthusiastic. And most encouraging was the manner in which the delegates applied what they had learned when they returned to their pastorates. One of the activities which grew out of the conferences was an expansion of the "Lavoura de Deus (Planting for God), the adaptation of the Lord's Acre movement to Brazil and one of the steps toward an economic base for the indigenous church.

In cooperation with medical forces the agricultural worker can give leadership in sanitary practices, and the promotion of home gardens for improvement of diet. Through club work he can lead the young people in proper health and dietary habits. In cooperation with the schools he can help teachers to develop school gardens and agricultural practice. He can cooperate with all in various forms of community extension. This may take the form of organization of cooperatives for buying and selling.

So through integrated evangelism the agricultural missionary becomes part of a program that changes all phases of human life, making it more abundant, thus helping to give answer to Jesus prayer, "Thy kingdom come."